



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

Health Equity HUB

Improving Access to Food Through I Can for Kids' Grocery Gift Card Program

Case study

Addressing food insecurity in Calgary through a grocery gift card program from I Can for Kids (iCAN)

Background

- Household food insecurity is defined as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints; it affects 22.9% of Canadian households in the 10 provinces, with Alberta experiencing one of the highest rates at 27.4%.
- Food insecurity is a major barrier to achieving health equity, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities and increasing risks of poor nutrition, chronic disease, and poor mental health.
- To address this issue, I Can for Kids (iCAN), a Calgary-based non-profit organization, implemented a grocery gift card program providing low-income families with children the means to purchase nutritious food.
- A qualitative descriptive study was conducted to explore the experiences and perceived outcomes of both recipients and deliverers of this program.
- The study was conducted in partnership between iCAN and academic members of the Health Equity HUB at the O'Brien Institute for Public Health.

Methodology

Between August and November 2020, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 54 participants in Calgary, Alberta. This group comprised 37 program recipients and 17 program deliverers. The study utilized Freedman et al.'s framework of nutritious food access to guide data generation and analysis.

Key findings

1. **Enhanced autonomy and dignity**
Recipients valued the financial support, flexibility, and convenience offered by the grocery gift card. The ability to choose preferred foods fostered a sense of autonomy and dignity, positively impacting their social and emotional well-being.
2. **Improved dietary patterns and food skills**
Access to grocery gift cards enabled households to incorporate more nutritious foods into their diets. Some recipients reported that the program encouraged them to develop better food purchasing and preparation skills.
3. **Program strengths and limitations**
Both recipients and deliverers identified strengths such as the program's responsiveness to community needs and its positive impact on household finances. However, areas for improvement were noted, including the need for clearer distribution criteria and increased awareness to reach more households in need.

Recommendations

- **Increase support levels:** Providing larger or more frequent grocery gift cards could offer greater assistance to food-insecure households.
- **Clarify distribution criteria:** Establishing transparent and consistent guidelines for grocery gift card distribution would enhance fairness and understanding among recipients.
- **Enhance program awareness:** Implementing targeted advertising and outreach strategies could inform more eligible households about the program's availability.

Conclusion

- The iCAN grocery gift card program has been helpful in providing dignified access to nutritious food, improving household finances, and enhancing the well-being of participants. By addressing identified areas for improvement, the program can further strengthen its impact on reducing food insecurity in Calgary.
- The research was guided by the lived experiences of food-insecure households and resulted in tangible program adjustments, ensuring greater responsiveness to community needs. The partnership between iCAN and researchers underscores the power of community-led solutions in shaping equity-driven policies and interventions.
- Framing the issue of food security within a health equity lens can drive policy discussions and decisions that address root causes rather than short-term fixes.

Want to learn more?

- [Research | I Can for Kids](#)
- [Experiences and perceived outcomes of a grocery gift card programme for households at risk of food insecurity - PubMed](#)
- [Health Equity HUB](#)

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References

- Lee, YY, Caron-Roy, S, Turko, B, Shearer, J, Campbell, DJT, Elliott, C, Barker, D, Raine, KD, Tyminski, S, & Olstad, DL. "Experiences and perceived outcomes of a grocery gift card programme for households at risk of food insecurity." *Public Health Nutrition* 26, no. 11 (2023): 2460-2469.
- Freedman, DA, Blake, CE & Liese, AD. "Developing a multicomponent model of nutritious food access and related implications for community and policy practice." *Journal of Community Practice* 21 (2013): 379–409.